

# Mead's Milkweed

*Asclepias meadii*

## Guidelines for Landowners Using Conservation Practices

Missouri Department of  
Conservation

Common name ▪ Mead's milkweed  
Scientific name ▪ *Asclepias meadii*  
State status ▪ Endangered  
Federal status ▪ Threatened

### Ecology

Mead's milkweed was once widespread in the tallgrass prairies in the Midwest, including most of Missouri. Today, it can be found on prairie remnants and railroad rights-of-way in the Osage Plains region, and on igneous glades in the St. Francois Mountains region of the Ozarks. Maturation time from seed may be as long as five to eight years. Observations have shown that individual plants produce flowers for two or three years and then rest, and in some cases have no aboveground stems for a few years. The flowering period for Mead's milkweed is mid-May until early June.

### Reasons for Decline

Populations of Mead's milkweed declined as native prairies were converted for agricultural and urban uses. Current threats include the following: loss of habitat due to urbanization and agricultural land conversion, lack of fire, habitat fragmentation, insect and fungal attacks, mid-summer haying, herbivory and pesticide applications. The low number of individual plants at any one site may not attract pollinators, and this may be the cause for low reproductive success.

### Recommendations

Projects being considered in potential Mead's milkweed habitat should include a survey of the area by a trained biologist for remnant native prairies or igneous glades. If present, native prairies and

igneous glades should be surveyed for Mead's milkweed during late May.

Delay haying until after Mead's milkweed has dispersed seeds, i.e. mid-September or later. On currently grazed sites, do not increase grazing pressure by adding head or reducing the size of the grazing unit. Do not introduce grazing to Mead's milkweed sites that are not currently grazed.

Promote land management activities that restore prairie and glade communities. Areas adjacent to existing Mead's milkweed sites should be managed in such a way as to prevent the introduction of nonnative species or possible degradation of the native plant community. Reintroduction into suitable habitats is best accomplished with plants grown in greenhouses and then transplanted to the field.

Refer to Management Recommendations for Conserving Native Prairie in Missouri for additional guidelines.

Consider the balance between adverse and beneficial practices when determining the overall effect of a conservation practice.



Photo Credit: Missouri Department of Conservation

### Beneficial Practices

- Use prescribed burning between late September 15 and April 1 to stimulate sexual reproduction in Mead's milkweed. Burn management units at least once every five

years, although every three years is preferred.

- Control invasive plants on sites where this species occurs. To minimize harm to this species use a selective herbicide, a spot application, or well timed application with a nonselective herbicide when this plant is dormant.
- Reduce encroachment of woody vegetation on native prairie. Prairies overgrown with woody vegetation shade out the ground flora, including Mead's milkweed.
- Graze livestock in a manner that promotes Mead's milkweed but does not promote invasive plants, nor degrade or destroy the plant community.

### **Adverse Practices**

- Degradation or destruction of prairie or glade communities where Mead's milkweed occurs.
- Establishing invasive vegetation, such as tall fescue, sericea lespedeza, Bermuda grass or Caucasian bluestem on sites with Mead's milkweed or nearby where it could spread into the native plant community, and thus degrade or destroy habitat for this species.
- Establishing trees or shrubs in areas where this species occurs.
- Heavy foot traffic, vehicle traffic, or use of heavy machinery in areas with Mead's milkweed populations.
- Mowing, haying or burning of Mead's milkweed populations during the April through September growing period.
- Allowing continuous or heavy grazing during flowering and fruiting periods (April-September).
- Grazing on Mead's milkweed sites that are not currently grazed.
- Conducting earthmoving practices or causing erosion that destroys or degrades communities with this species.
- Applying a nonselective or broadleaf herbicide in areas where this species is located and actively growing.
- Unmanaged application of pesticides, animal waste or fertilizers that destroys or degrades prairies that support populations of this species.

### **Information Contacts**

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Policy Coordination Section  
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Jefferson City, MO 65102-0180  
Telephone: 573-751-4115

<http://www.mdc.mo.gov/nathis/endangered/>

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
Ecological Services Field Office  
101 Park DeVille Dr., Suite A  
Columbia, MO 65203  
Telephone: 573-234-2132

<http://www.fws.gov/midwest/partners/missouri.html>

### **Legal**

The Missouri Department of Conservation prepared these guidelines for conservation practices with assistance from other state agencies, contractors, and others to provide guidance to those people who wish to voluntarily act to protect wildlife and habitat.

Compliance with these management guidelines is not required by the Missouri wildlife and forestry law or by any regulation of the Missouri Conservation Commission. Other federal, state or local laws may affect construction practices.

"State Endangered Status" is determined by the Missouri Conservation Commission under constitutional authority, and specific requirements for impacts to such species are expressed in the Missouri Wildlife Code, rule 3 CSR 10-4.111.

Species listed under the Federal Endangered Species Act must be considered in projects receiving federal funds or requiring permits under the Clean Water Act, with compliance issues resolved in consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.